

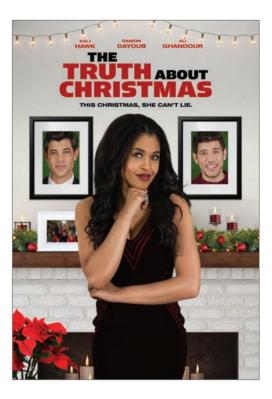
The magazine celebrating television's golden era of scripted programming



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Writer's Room: Less is more



'd always wanted to be a writer. I don't ever remember seriously considering anything else. As a teenager, I was precociously caught between my love of movies and books when my mum bought me Screenwriting For Dummies and said, 'You should do that'. Not very poetic. But as I combed through that book and started to write my first – of many – terrible scripts, something definitely clicked. This suited me. This was how I wanted to write stories.

Since then, my journey from writing episodes to writing my own show has been pretty standard insofar as there is almost zero standard. I've told friends and family in the past that writing can be a nicely paid job with absolutely no guarantee of 'career progression'. You can be doing the same thing for 20 years and have a privileged and wonderful time and be very satisfied and happy.

But if your ambition is to create your own programmes, you can

No one has a clue what's going to work, but they know what resonates with them.

Commissioned by TV3 Ireland and coproduced with US SVOD Acorn TV, the UK's Channel 5 picked up *Blood* as the first original under its low-budget scripted strategy. Writer Sophie Petzal explains why working with less money can lead to more meaningful results.

spend the same 20 years smashing your head against a brick wall, lying awake at night, haunted by the Ghosts of Commissioners Past, Present and Future telling you: 'We absolutely want to be the home of your first project... just not this one. Or this one. Or-'

A writer friend told me once: 'Make sure everything you write is something you'd be excited to write for two years if it was greenlit'. That has proven to be a salient piece of advice.

There's a cacophony of noise in this industry about what buyers want and don't want, and what shows tank or shine. These days there are a thousand networks; it's a writer's market; and we aren't dead in the water when we're declined by the main three British broadcasters anymore.

But in spite of all that opportunity, it is easy to get lost. You find yourself writing to a thousand briefs, writing reasonably accomplished scripts that you like but don't love – that are really just faint imitations of what's come before – but the producer swears blind that that's what Netflix is looking for. Your work has all the affectations and trimmings of 'premium drama' but nothing of you, and despite the demand for new content, we're too often just writing and watching the same shows over and over again.

So, amid all that racket, it's worth remembering that no one actually has a clue what's going to work, but they do know what resonates with them. And sometimes, the less money the buyer has to play with, the more they are forced to listen to that instinct.

And what resonates is voice. A spark. Your interpretation of the world, and the specific way in which you translate it. Perhaps it shouldn't have been a surprise to me that of all the projects I've had in development, the first to cross the line was a tiny show, about a little family, with more of me in it than I was once comfortable sharing. But it did, and it taught me something. We're all just fans of television, whether we're watching, writing or buying, and we're all looking for the same thing.









Is UK drama at its tipping point?



As 2019 kicks off with the anticipation of new drama-packed SVODs, Neal Street Productions co-founder Dame Pippa Harris tells Kaltrina Bylykbashi how the rise of streamers has left UK drama at a dangerous tipping point

or Dame Pippa Harris, and her Neal Street Productions, which All3Media brought under its umbrella in 2015, there is much to celebrate coming into the new year. Long-running British East End drama *Call The Midwife* is heading into its eighth season, with all new trials and tribulations written by Heidi Thomas and crew.

Later in 2019, the title will be joined by a second series of Sky's epic drama *Britannia*, this time filmed entirely in the UK, and a fourth season of *Penny Dreadful*, which makes its way across the pond for a focus on LA. Elsewhere the prodco is celebrating the success of the recently launched BBC thriller, *Informer*, which Harris says has performed "brilliantly" on iPlayer and especially among the muchdesired younger audiences in the UK.

To top it off Harris, became BAFTA chair in 2018 and has already been successfully incorporating diversity schemes for award entries, which she says has had noticeable impact.

Despite this Harris is ringing alarm bells and emphasises that UK producers are going to have to look very closely at the TV ecosystem in the coming year as global SVOD behemoths continue to strengthen their position in the business.

"It's a tipping point at the moment and potentially a really dangerous time for the UK because we can all get a little bit blinded by the money that's come in from the SVOD players without thinking, culturally, is this good for us? Is this good for us as a nation?" she says.

The warning arrives shortly after Netflix pledged to increase European productions by a third in 2019. Netflix will also be joined by new challengers this year, including Apple and Disney, who have also pledged to localise content for select territories. The astronomical figures that these companies bring to the ecosystem are likely to skew the price of content for a long time, according to Harris.

"When they first started working in the UK it was all about coproducing with our PSBs, and doing a lot of work with the BBC and Channel 4," she says.

"Over the last couple of years they've virtually turned that tap off and the unintended consequence of that and the danger of it is that it's becoming increasingly difficult for PSBs to fund the high-end drama that they used to co-finance with Netflix and Amazon. The costs have all escalated so much that you might be looking now at a per hour cost of £3m and obviously they can't afford to fully fund that."

There are many other unintended consequences for scripted projects. Harris is concerned about how much SVODs are investing in talent development, the types of projects that will gain financing and whether UK producers will have a future in the current ecosystem.

The talent exchange

Neal Street has a proud history of developing unknown writers and directors and giving them the opportunity to work on top projects. *Penny Dreadful* writer Krysty Wilson-Cairns has gone on to pen

1917, a new feature from Steven Spielberg's Amblin Productions and Neal Street co-founder Sam Mendes; while BBC hit *Informer* is cast with a list of new faces and written by Rory Haines and Sohrab Noshirvani. The list goes on.

It is why the current SVOD multimillion dollar deals for top names from Ryan Murphy to Oprah is a particular sticking point for Harris.

"They want to come in and cherry pick the talent at the top of the tree and not really do the groundwork in terms of developing the next generation," she says.

Over the last couple of years SVODs have virtually turned the coproduction tap off in the UK

"How much investment are these companies putting into nurturing new writing talent, new directing talent – all the things which historically, the PSBs in the UK have done brilliantly? That's not really of interest to them."

Local talent is further left behind as the SVODs seek out global stories for global audiences, even if they are in local languages.

"In the past, the BBC was able to tell quintessentially British stories on a big scale because of the co-production funding. Now that's drying up and the danger is that the only things that will be easily fundable are the shows that the SVODs think will have global appeal. That's not necessarily the best drama for a UK audience," she adds.

Furthemore, Harris questions whether independent production companies such as Neal Street will even exist in the future as the rulebook for rights is torn apart in an increasingly fragmented TV market.

"We ourselves are part way through our earn-out with All3, which for us has been fantastic. They've been a great support to us as a company. Whether in the future little independent companies like ours are going to be an attractive proposition for anybody to be buying or supporting is up for debate – because they won't own anything. They won't have a catalogue of programmes they own themselves," she says.

"It's a dangerous change in the ecosystem and we should all be weary of entering this space without examining properly what's going on and how it's affecting the drama choices that are being made."

SVODs staff up with UK execs

Like many of the producers TBI has spoken to, however, Harris believes there is some hope at turning the tide as major localised roles go to top broadcast execs. Netflix's move to hire Harris' colleague Anne Mensah – who commissioned *Britannia* – is one such move.

"I think her appointment is hugely positive in the sense that she is an absolutely brilliant commissioner, and one of the few UK commissioners who has consistently shown leadership, taste and all the things you want. She's also really popular in the industry, she's hugely respectful of writers and producers and she's very good at managing talent," says Harris.

"I would hope that under her leadership she's going to reverse the policy of pulling out of co-productions because she knows herself when she was at Sky how important that money is. [Co-productions] allow the UK industry to thrive in a way that I'm not sure simply taking upfront money from a Netflix will. Down the line it is not the best thing for an independent producer to do."

'Peak drama' is yet to come

With new players getting into the streaming game, Harris says we are yet to reach 'peak drama', with a third more scripted projects expected to arrive as Apple and Disney enter the space.

This sets further challenges as the sheer volume of titles may begin to grate on consumers, pushing content providers to consolidate and reduce the number of projects they commission.

"My hunch is that eventually there will be a tipping point, because people simply cannot watch that amount of content," says Harris.

In the meantime, production companies have to work out how to best place programming in an increasingly complex ecosystem.

"In terms of an overnight audience, it was very telling how *Bodyguard* smashed it out of the park and became a live TV phenomena, and within weeks you had *Killing Eve*, which snuck up on people on iPlayer and word of mouth.

"It meant that the consolidated figures at the end of the 28 days were absolutely enormous because people were finding it online then gobbling up the whole boxset. What's interesting is that those two very different models can coexist within the same broadcaster and within the same two-month period." §









Atlantic Crossing

Kyle MacLachlan and Sofia Helin star in a big-budget WWII drama that looks at the relationship between Norwegian Crown Princess Martha and President Roosevelt

Act 1 Norwegian producer Cinenord and German producer-distributor Beta Film's Atlantic Crossing is set to be one of the biggest Scandinavian productions to date having received \$3.5m in subsidies through the Norwegian Film Institute's incentive programme.

It is one of the largest investments of Norwegian funding ever granted and, combined with another Cinenord title, *Wisting*, it tops Universal's movie *The Snowman*, starring Helin and Michael Fassbender, which received near \$5m in funding.

The drama, which began production in December 2018 and arrives at Norwegian broadcaster NRK in 2021, revisits Norwegian Crown Princess Martha and President Franklin Roosevelt in the 1940s and is set across the UK, US and Norway.

As the Germans invaded Norway during WWII Martha and her three children were forced to flee the nation and were invited by Roosevelt to live in the White House for safety. While months of war continued Martha and FDR developed a deep fondness for one another, which some, including FDR's son James, suggested stretched to a romantic relationship.

What's more prominent in the TV adaptation is how Martha became an influential figure in world politics, attempting to influence FDR to push a neutral US to aid Norway in its fight with the Nazi occupation.

"My main focus has been to get as close as possible to the characters and reveal them as human beings," says Alexander Eik, Cinenord founder and co-writer, showrunner and director for the drama.

"We do know these characters as historical figures through their





official persona, but in this story we will see them in their private lives and know them as human beings in a way that we are not able to do through what now exists in historical material."

The notion was strong enough to reel in *Twin Peaks* star MacLachlan and *The Bridge* lead Helin, who were immediately drawn to the complex characters.

"The script came, and when I noticed it was about FDR I was immediately interested. He's such a fascinating, complex character and when I read the script, I couldn't put it down. I just went from episode to episode and I loved that [Alexander] focused on the people," says MacLachlan.

Act 2 Atlantic Crossing has been in the works since 2011. In the first few years, Eik and co-writer Linda Kallestein had ambitions to write the story as a feature film, but shelved it when the material became too voluminous for a three-hour feature.

"I realised that the eight sequences of the film were actually the eight episodes of what could be a TV series. We started to develop it as a TV series and worked for quite a while before we presented this to NRK. When we did, we already had a pretty well-developed framework of the whole story," says Eik.

NRK developed the drama with Eik and Kallestein for another two years before it went into production in late 2018. The timing to release the project has been "perfect" according to Eik.

"Everything's coming together at the right time," he says. "When I think about how the story resonates with what we're seeing today in America with the isolationism and the America First movement, these are all things that are really present in the 70-year-old story we're telling. Now we see that it's history repeating itself."

The tie to contemporary political life is what gives the story relevance for modern audiences. It's one of the reasons Helin, who learned Norwegian specifically for the role, found the character of Martha so appealing - her strength speaks to recent feminist dialogues and puts an important historical moment on one woman's shoulders.

"I think the timing of this project is perfect in two ways. One, the audience has seen *The Crown* and they're really interested in female

royalty. The other thing is it's the perfect time post-#MeToo movement to have untold female stories revealed in drama," says Helin.

She adds: "She was a refugee really. She had to sell her diamonds for cash. I've been thinking about refugees a lot in the past few years and even though she was a 'luxury' refugee, the series highlights that it's always a scary situation to be in."

MacLachlan also sees some political parallels in the drama, although he says some current political leaders could stand to learn a thing or two from FDR.

"He was a man who presided over two very difficult times in American history, going through The Great Depression and WWII and he was a man who had a very strong social conscious," he says.

"Our current situation in America feels like it has staying power, which is disturbing to me. There's a resilience there that is also disturbing to me. Many people on the other side are protesting and pointing and keeping up a good fight, but I just don't feel like it's going to go away."

Act 3 Cinenord founders Silje and Alexander Eik have confirmed that several broadcasters outside of NRK are already interested in the property and that Netflix has also shown interest.

"I'm hoping we can get the series out to a lot of territories around the world. Of course, our home territory is the most important, but it is a universal story and we think it can travel," says Silje Eik.

As deals for the upcoming title are worked out, the duo also confirmed that they will maintain the drama as a limited series and that no second series is planned as yet. §

In focus

Format: 8 x 60-minutes

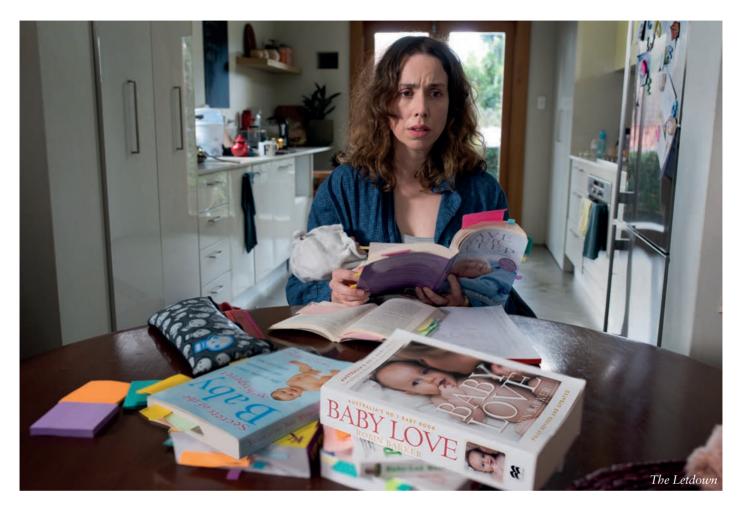
Cast: Kyle MacLachlan, Sofia Helin, Tobias

Santelmann

Exec producers: Alexander Eik, Silje Eik



Ascent of Oz



Drama from down under is enjoying a watershed moment as productions attract the attention of global SVODs and travel seamlessly around the world - what's behind Australian TV's global walkabout? Manori Ravindran reports.

nce on the periphery of the international drama market, global-facing offerings such as ABC's *The Letdown* are drawing the interest of global SVODs and bringing scripted programming from down under into the top echelons of TV.

The comedy about new motherhood began life on the Australian public broadcaster as one of its Amazon-style pilots in April 2016, before sparking interest from Netflix, which joined as a co-production partner shortly after, launching the show globally in April 2018 to critical acclaim.

Helmed by *The Good Place* director Trent O'Donnell, the quirky and heartfelt *Letdown*, which details the first-year tribulations of a new mother and her partner, slotted in seamlessly amidst the global SVOD's raft of international programming – an ease that reflects higher production levels across Australian drama; global exposure to

Australian content; and, in part, audience demand for new TV offerings.

"The Letdown has been important in laying the groundwork for talking about more co-productions, and it has enabled us to interact with more international partners," explains ABC's head of comedy Rick Kalowski, highlighting the critical role international investment has played in improving the quality of drama from the region.

The exec joined the broadcaster in 2013, around the time it debuted comedy sensation *Please Like Me*.

The Josh Thomas-created title was subsequently acquired by US cable channel Pivot, which then co-commissioned a second series with ABC – catapulting Australian comedy into the global spotlight and welcoming international channel and platform partners just when the embattled public broadcaster needed them the most.

"We caught the wave when we really needed to do so for financial reasons," says Kalowski, describing the 2013/14 Conservative





government cuts that saw 10% of ABC's workforce laid off as a "devastating experience".

"Fortunately, we had such shows as [ABC/HBO co-production] *Summer Heights High* and *Please Like Me* behind us, and that opened the door to more co-productions."

Kalowski had been speaking to Netflix about potential projects in 2016 when *The Letdown* aired as a pilot. Following an official pitch in LA by the exec and executive producer Julian Morrow – a well-known comedy presenter in Australia – the SVOD came on board.

"International collaboration is becoming the template, and it's an effective one. It's an absolute godsend for us because the ABC is still in a difficult financial position," says Kalowski.

Projects on the horizon include the Sharon Horgan-exec produced comedy *Frayed*, a co-production with Sky that marks ABC's first UK collaboration, while Sydney-based producer Giant Dwarf is in the works on series two of *The Letdown*, which is currently being edited for release later this year with an expanded investment from Netflix.

"The budget jumped from a very modest one to a healthy budget for the second series. We wouldn't have been able to afford it without them," says Kalowski.

Chris Hilton, CEO of newly formed Essential Media and Entertainment, which was created out of the merger of *Rake* producer Essential and Quail Entertainment, says the Kew Media Group-backed business recently rebooted its drama arm with an eye on producing more international-facing drama.

The new venture comes more than a year after Fremantle bought Essential's drama division and set it up under the new banner of Easy Tiger Productions.

"We had a few projects that didn't go to Fremantle," explains Hilton, noting that a number of Essential Scripted projects at script stage have so far drawn both domestic and international interest.

"There is an appetite for young adult material and we are working with a few books. We have some sci-fi projects, and another set in a high school," says the exec.

"There seems to be a renewed appetite for that material because Netflix has been so successful with shows such as *The Chilling Adventures of Sabrina*. We are also looking at big, period classics that could also go to SVOD players."

Hilton adds that budget levels are steadily rising due to international co-production and co-financing. "This is enabling higher quality production venues and higher-profile talent, which help these shows travel," he says, citing recent break-out dramas, such as the Jenna Coleman-fronted BBC One/ABC thriller *The Cry*.

Budget levels used to hover around the AUS\$1m (US\$717,000) level per hour of drama, but now reach up to AUS\$2.5m (US\$1.8m) per hour, thanks largely to international partners.

However, the new model also presents some challenges for producers around development.

"All broadcasters are in a situation where they are depending on another player outside Australia for a significant part of their budget. This means they are less likely to develop themselves from scratch and prefer to see scripts rather than going off concepts," says Hilton.

"Ultimately, a lot of development goes back to the producer, along with that risk. That's not great if you're a small player and can't afford to pay for development."

The reliance on global partners also affects the types of content that get commissioned, with packaging internationally recognised talent becoming more of a priority.

DCD Rights was among the first distributors to have wide-ranging success with Australian drama, but CEO Nicky Davies-Williams acknowledges that talent plays a major part in how the programming has sold overseas.

The business's breakthrough in the region came with 2011 ABC Australia series *The Slap*, which sold into the US (DirecTV) and UK (BBC Four) and was also adapted Stateside by NBC in 2015.

More recently, DCD pre-sold Channel 10 procedural *My Life Is Murder*, which stars New Zealand actor Lucy Lawless, into AMC-owned SVOD Acorn TV.

"These types of deals largely revolve around talent and with Lawless involved, we have found that the pre-sales are available and broadcasters are interested in getting involved," says Davies-Williams.

"What's been helpful about the Australian market is that many of its acting talent works on both sides of the Atlantic and that has worked tremendously well."

While she allows that broadcasters such as the ABC have "less investment" than they used to, the quality has kept pace with international broadcasters and platforms.

"All the networks are much more interested in drama than they have been, and in a much more universally focused way that is helpful to distributors. There is more of a market for it now than there was."









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Raising the bar

For decades, the telenovela has been Latin America's flagship TV genre, seducing audiences around the world. But shifts in the landscape have pushed the region's TV giants to usher in a new generation that targets international markets and streaming platforms. Emiliano de Pablos reports.

powerhouse of creative TV talent in Latin America is redefining the region's scripted propositions and responding to an increasingly global demand for shorter, high-quality drama productions driven by cash-flush

OTT platforms.

Fiction formats in the region have fast evolved, transforming from traditional 100-plus episode telenovelas to 50 to 60-episode super-series and 10 to 13-episode premium series.

"We saw telenovelas go global 25 years ago. Now, a similar phenomenon is taking place, and we are starting to recapture that exporting might through new competitive scripted formats," says Marcos Santana, president of Telemundo Global Studios, part of NBCU Telemundo Enterprises.



The end of telenovelas?

Bertrand Villegas, co-founder of research company The Wit, says the main trend going into 2019 is the "de-telenovela-ization" of Latin American TV drama, which is looking to adapt to new and younger domestic audiences, international markets and OTT platforms.

"It means shorter series with less episodes, more drama such as thrillers and comedy dramas, and less melodrama," he adds. "But all of that is still founded on two local pillars: biographical or "bio" series and narconovelas."

Lisette Osorio, VP at Caracol International, adds: "The time to take a leap in content and tackle riskier issues has arrived. This will mean more narco-series and bio-series, which come with faster, condensed narrative arcs. Visually, they are also very different from what the audience is used to."

With La Reina del Sur in 2011, Telemundo entered the arena of premium, action-packed drama with higher production values and the potential for multiple series.

Re-teaming with writer Arturo Pérez Reverte and actress Kate del Castillo, Telemundo has just produced a new season of *La Reina*. Filmed across 14 cities in eight countries, the series kicks off in Moscow's Red Square, where – in what suggests another trend in scripted TV from the region – every character speaks in their natural language.

Telemundo's offerings include the series *El Barón*, the result of a partnership with Sony, that follows the trend of narco-themed productions.

Released in September on Telemundo and December on Netflix, *El Recluso*, a remake of Argentinian series *El marginal*, marks Telemundo's first premium series; the second, *Jugar con fuego*, is a 10-part coproduction with Brazil's TV giant Globo, adapting Globo series *Amores Roubados*.

Premium series represent a further step in the "de-telenovela-ization" process. "They occupy a greater niche than super-series," Santana says.

"At the technical level, we are at the height of Hollywood productions. The difference is in the cost of talent," he adds.

El Recluso taps top Hispanic and Hollywood talent, such as cinematographer Jaime Reynoso (Elysium) and Oscar-winning production designer Brigitte Broch (Moulin Rouge!).

Argentina's Ignacio Serricchio (*Bones*, *The Young and the Restless*) stars as a former Marine who infiltrates a maximum-security prison on the US-Mexico border to retrieve the abducted daughter of an American judge.

Produced by Sebastián Ortega at Underground Producciones, *El Marginal* inked numerous sales, which were handled by Dori Media Distribution.

"Telenovelas are still selling better worldwide to linear broadcasters – especially in Eastern Europe and Asia – than new generation Latin drama. But high-end dramas are receiving a lot of attention, in markets, festivals, trade press and from OTT platforms and pay-TV broadcasters," Villegas says.

Growing international interest

"The mounting international appetite for dramas originating in the Hispanic market has gained strength in the last five to seven years, and today, it is consolidating," says Guillermo Borensztein, VP of content sales and co-production for Viacom International Media Networks across the Americas.

This is in response to several factors, among them "the emergence of new players, increases in production budgets and the risk assumed by creators and producers when it comes to understanding the importance of adapting to the global market from the very beginning of each project," he explains.

"New audiences are opening up to subtitled series," says Beatriz Setuain at Mediapro's distribution arm, Imagina International Sales.

Hollywood studios have traditionally kept an eye on international scripted TV. Their bets on Spanish-language TV drama formats is best exemplified by ABC's *Ugly Betty*, USA Network's *Queen of The South*, Fox's *Red Band Society*, NBC's *The Mysteries of Laura* and CBS All Access's *Tell Me A Story*.

These proven successes have meant that the studios' interest is only growing.

"There is an increased openness in the US to Spanish-language IP because of the growing importance of the Hispanic market to the US, the growing size of the Latin American audience and the growing reputation of Spanish content, particularly on the back of shows such as *La Casa de Papel*," says Villegas.

By March, ABC will launch the US version of Bambú Producciones-Atresmedia's hit mystery-romance *Grand Hotel*, produced by Eva Longoria's UnbeliEVAble banner.

"Grand Hotel connected to different countries and cultures around the world in the pre-OTT era," says Teresa Fernández Valdés, co-founder of Madrid-based Bambú.

Meanwhile, ABC is developing another Bambú format in political thriller *The Embassy*, which is also produced by Longoria.

Elsewhere, Daniel Écija's supernatural cop drama *Estoy Vivo*, a Mediapro production for Spanish pubcaster TVE, is being developed by David Wilcox (*Bull*) for CBS, while Colombia's Caracol TV also linked with Propagate to develop FX series *La Niña*, the true story of a 10-year-old girl kidnapped by rebels who







became a guerrilla fighter.

"Character-driven stories are easier to adapt in any market," says Inside Content's Geraldine Gonard, director of Conecta Fiction, the Spain-based international TV drama co-production event.

Controversial issues

Colombian broadcaster Caracol has been a pioneer in betting on scripted programming that isn't afraid to tackle controversial issues.

Launched in 2006, Sin senos no hay paraíso (Without Breasts There is No Paradise) captured international attention thanks in part to its eyebrow-raising title, but also for being the first Latin series to delve into the narco universe. Caracol continued down that path with El Cartel de Los Sapos and Pablo Escobar, El Patrón del Mal.

"We did the series with a good knowledge of the context. We kept in mind everything the country experienced as well as the victims' point of view, and in doing so, we attracted the attention of the international market, showing how Colombians told our own history," Osorio says. Forming part of a true-story trend, the bioseries phenomenon exploded in Latin America in 2016 with the hit *Hasta que te conocí*, the story of the late Mexican artist Juan Gabriel, produced by Disney Media Distribution Latin America, Somos and Mexico's BTF Media.

With special intensity in México, bio-series, often under the Disney-BTF alliance, have attracted great audience interest, from *El César*, about boxer Julio César Chávez, to *El Secreto de Selena*, a thriller based on a journalistic investigation of the killing of the Queen of Tex-Mex Selena Quintanilla in 1995.

One of the more recent releases, *Luis Miguel*, *la serie*, is an MGM production for Netflix and Telemundo. Argentina is also bringing its pop heroes to the screen, most notably with *Sandro de América*, produced by Juan Parodi's The Magic Eye and Viacom's Telefe; as well as a forthcoming bio-series about boxer Carlos Monzón that sees Disney teaming with Pampa Films; and Amazon's show on football star Diego Maradona, produced by Dhana Media, BTF and Raze.

Televisa, Mexican TV's biggest player, is repositioning itself after forming its own SVOD platform Blim.

Tapping Patricio Wills as president of Televisa Studios, the TV giant aims to become a multi-platform content factory, producing content for its channels as well as third-party companies.

The business is looking to remake 20 of its most iconic telenovelas as shorter-format, 25-episode series, with ambitious production levels and more contemporary storytelling. One recent example is a remake of 1979's *The Rich Also Cry*.

Elsewhere, Brazil remains one of the Latin American countries where local telenovelas dominate daily TV schedules.

From 2010, with Record TV's *La Tierra Prometida* and more recently *Jesús*, biblical series have become a new sub-genre.

Latin America's biggest broadcast network, Brazil's Globo, explores new areas of fiction that go beyond the classic telenovela with mini-series such as *Harassment*, about a group of women who come together to expose the sexual abuse committed by a doctor, or its first period drama, *God Save the King*.

Viacom's steady growth

Two years after the acquisition of Telefe, Viacom continues its expansion in Latin America with Viacom International Studios (VIS) moving increasingly into original productions and strategic co-productions.

In Argentina, VIS closed a four-series coproduction deal with Cablevisión Flow and Telefe, picking up *Morir de Amor* and *Drunk History*. It has also teamed with Paramount Southern and Western Europe, Middle East and Africa (SWEMEA) on a series remake of Alfred Hitchcock's *To Catch A Thief* by Spanish showrunner Javier Olivares.

In Brazil, Comedy Central also linked with Porta dos Fundos in a partnership that has seen deals with Netflix (*Borges*) and Amazon (*Homens*).

Elsewhere, in Colombia, Viacom's Nickelodeon has teamed with Mediapro to produce teen telenovela *N00bees* and is currently co-producing youth superseries *Club 57* with Rainbow.

In conjunction with Amazon and Paramount Channel, VIS started preproduction in Mexico on *Dani Who?*, and has plans to quadruple its scripted output over the coming year.



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The vast opportunity in adaptation

Ana Langenberg, SVP, Format Sales & Production, NBCUniversal International Formats

ne of the key takeaways in 2018, a banner year for scripted, was that local content is in high demand. From FAANGs to linear broadcasters, it has been made abundantly clear that local stories and authentic content is top of the wish list. Buyers and commissioners want more content that feels true to the country it originates from.

Although original content is voluminous, with a peak 495 scripted series landing in 2018, there is also a strong appetite for tried and tested formats that lend themselves to local adaptation - particularly in territories such as Russia, the Middle East and Turkey.

These formats provide broadcasters and platforms a much quicker path from commissioning to screen with development time dramatically cut down. Formats also reduce risk and provide a certain level of assurance for those willing to invest.

Hungry for more

There remains a strong appetite from broadcasters for procedurals. Series such as *Law & Order* continue to capture millions in the US and all over the world – both as a finished show and format. It's a perennial genre that continues to rate well and entertain. As a format, it allows for several sub genres, stories and characters for audiences to engage with.

Nearly 17 years since it launched on USA Network, Monk also continues to generate interest. It was successfully adapted for local audiences in Turkey and we're in discussions with other territories for local versions, including Germany where it is currently under option. House is a classic example of a procedural that has pushed boundaries and crossed borders. Starring Aleksei Serebryakov (McMafia) as lead, the Russian version has enjoyed great success on Rossiya 1 across two seasons. Non-Stop Production and Rossiva 1 have generated a local version that boasts high quality production standards and excellent on-screen talent, and harnesses the genius storytelling that ran through the original with Hugh Laurie. With 177 original episodes available for adaptation, it has the potential to be a long-running success in Russia and territories such as Turkey, where it has been optioned.

Another perennial genre that's always in demand is family drama. Broadcasters are always looking for content families can connect and identify with. Audiences want to watch content that resonates with them, so dramas that depict diverse or complex characters, and modern day relationships are hugely popular for both linear and SVOD platforms alike.

Whilst it can be one of the hardest to get right, comedy is another genre in demand. There has been vast interest in comedy over the past year and it's been great to see the likes of YouTube hungry for it and traditional broadcasters making it more mainstream.

With central universal themes, distinctive visual identities and multiple series and scripts available, they're easy and appealing to adapt. They're also really cost effective to produce. The latest titles to grab our clients' interest are workplace comedy *Superstore* and fantasy comedy *The Good Place*, from our partners Universal Television.

Unique sensibilities

The most succesful localised content embraces unique sensibilities. From the local audiences' culture and language, to their different tastes and sensitivities. For a show to really land, it needs to speak to viewers, depict them and be attuned with their principles, beliefs and values.

When working with local partners on adaptations, our approach is to be flexible and allow room for their creativity to flow. We always bring producers of the original series on board for adaptations to offer an extra layer of support and act as a sounding board for scriptwriting or casting. It's important for us to ensure that any scripted adaptation shares the same high production values, calibre of cast and most importantly, replicates the great storytelling for local audiences. It's also important to collaborate post-production with local partners. Where possible and appropriate, we always try to help with marketing and in some cases leverage talent from original series to add an



extra 'wow' factor. The success of *Suits* in Korea wasn't just down to it being an adaptation of a great original series, but also because the cast was just as strong as the original. Promotion and marketing (locally and internationally) was also integral – with the help of the original US cast. The Korean series marked the first international adaptation and its success paved the way for the Japanese version, which also rated well. Now we have several other territories in the region interested.

Local for global

Thanks to SVODs such as Netflix, local dramas and particularly European dramas, such as *Dark*, have become global hits on a much larger scale than before. The case remains the same for formats, too. We have seen a huge demand for our Australian formats such as *The Slap* and *Safe Harbour*, both produced by our Australian outfit Matchbox Pictures. Both shows proved very successful in their original market. The well written, complex characters and universal storylines of modern friendship, parenthood and domestic life enable it to travel well. Telenovelas are also having a global renaissance. As a format, telenovelas work really well across Southern and Eastern Europe and Asia, where the genre is very popular.

Local content has opened up many opportunities for content creators, as we look ahead. There are ample untapped opportunities to explore in this wonderful global world of content we're currently living in. The key to success? Authenticity.





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